They are risen! Six undead player races

Race
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Illustration by Jean-Guilhem Barguès

Dead Like Me

Unlife is nothing to envy: while you may have more time than you had in life, it holds none of life's sweetness. The lilies of the field do not smell, food has no taste, and even friendship itself, being a rare and valuable commodity in life, is more difficult to come by in unlife by an order of magnitude than it was in life.

Folk fear few things more than death, but undeath is certainly one of them. Despised, undead are anathema in most corners of the world, and are slain or driven out by extreme prejudice. Indeed, no small numbers of clerics and some paladins spent good portions of their lives keeping the essences of undeath at bay.

Notes for DMs on Undead Player Characters

Allowing a player to be a creature that is not a humanoid creature poses significant challenges for inexperienced Dungeon Masters. Here are a few common considerations:

- Undead are immune to poison damage, the poisoned condition. Most do not eat, sleep or drink to survive. An undead creature's immunity to fear has been intentionally omitted from these races. The exact rules governing death, resurrection, and undeath are left to the DM to determine.
- Review the abilities of the cleric and paladin classes, as well as spells that affect undead when preparing challenges for undead player characters. Re-read any healing, reincarnation and resurrection and necromancy spells that might come up and consider your rulings ahead of time.
- Most folk fear and despise undead, and would seek to drive them out or destroy them once they recognize their nature. Undead are immune to common spells like *charm person* and *hold person*. Experienced spellcasters who cast such spells might recognize why the spell failed.
- The efficacy of spells, abilities and items that restore hit points, such as healing potions (or the availability of alternatives that would perform similar functions for undead) is determined by the DM. For example: "*When an undead creature casts a spell that restores hit points, such as* Cure Wounds *or* Healing Word*, the spell bypasses the restriction on targeting undead creatures."*

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Illustration by Guillem H. Pongiluppi

Bound Spirits: Unfinished Business

Long after their remains have turned to dust, the spirit of an individual can linger still. There are as many reasons for a ghost to haunt the world as there are folk in it. Ghosts are forcibly tied to the material plane by deep magic and are only able to move on when their unfinished business is concluded. Most ghosts awaken confused, and must discover what it is that holds their attachment to the world of the living, as if discovering a final piece of themselves that they must confront before entering the next phase of their existence.

Ghosts retain their general appearance as it was in life, although those who knew them often have difficulty recognizing them (much to the ghost's frustration). They also retain all of their memories– and these, perhaps all too well, for as the years go by with their business unconcluded, they begin to have difficulty forming new memories, or relating to a world that drifts further from their own time. These ghosts spend more and more time in the endless fog of the Ethereal Plane. These spirits become haunts and specters, appearing only when the world of the living presents a mirror for them to find something familiar in. These unfortunate souls must rely on others to conclude their unfinished business for them, or they are lost in ethereal fog for all time, which many would rightly consider a fate worse than what death had promised them.

Bound Spirit Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age. Bound spirits do not age, and can persist indefinitely until they are dispersed.

Alignment. Bound spirits share the alignment of their living self at first, although that may change over time.

Size. Bound spirits can be of most any race before they died. Your size is Medium or Small.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read and write any languages you knew in life.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Ethereal Sight. While upon the material plane, you can see into the ethereal plane up to a distance of 30 feet, and vice-versa.

Ethereal Jaunt. As a bonus action, you enter the Ethereal Plane. At the end of your next turn, return to the plane you originated from in the spot you currently occupy. If you occupy the same spot as a solid object or creature when this happens, you are immediately shunted to the nearest unoccupied space that you can occupy and take force damage equal to twice the number of feet you are moved. You can use this trait twice, and regain expended uses of it when you complete long rest.

Ethereal Rest. As an action, must use your action to become inert, entering the ethereal plane to complete a short or long rest. While inert you enter deeper into the Ethereal Plane, and are completely unaware of the goings-on of other planes. You cannot leave your inert state of your own volition until the required duration of your short or long rest has passed.

Speak with Dead. You can cast the *Speak with Dead* spell once and regain the ability to so do when you finish a short rest. If you cast the spell during a short or long rest, you can make a Wisdom (Insight) check to speak with a deceased soul of your choice that is also upon the Ethereal Plane. The difficulty of the check is determined by the Dungeon Master, and might

include such factors as where you entered the Ethereal Plane from, your familiarity with the individual, or the availability of the individual's spirit.

Ghostly Nature. You cannot be charmed, or become exhausted. You are immune to poison damage, and you can't be poisoned. You don't require air, food, drink, or sleep. If your ghost dies, your essence is irrevocably dispersed, and you are unable to be resurrected.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

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Illustration by Marius Siergiejew

Ghouls: Envy and Greed

Ghouls are undead borne to unlife through envy and greed, and they are consumed with desire for all the things they never have attained in life, usually wealth. While most ghouls lack the ambition to rise above mere graverobbing and feasting upon the recently deceased (or even the occasional gravedigger), some recall their unmet ambitions in more detail, and become obsessed with them.

Ghouls that maintain their unlife long enough can become ghasts, re-growing much of their lost skin, rotted-out organs, and regaining much of their former appearance, although their hollow eyes, monstrous teeth, long tongues and fearsome nails will eventually give them away. Ghasts also gain the ability to emit a foul stench, and to rally other undead in the face of clerics and paladins.

Ghouls enjoy the taste of rotting flesh and will horde pieces of individuals they found to be particularly tasty, savoring them as they rot, as if they were so much fine cheese.

Ghoul Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and your Wisdom score increases by 1.

Age. Ghouls do not age, but they do break. They can endure unlife indefinitely.

Alignment. Due to their insatiable greed, ghouls are generally of evil alignments.

Size. Ghouls can be of most any race before they died. Your size is Medium or Small.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read and write, the languages you knew in life and Abyssal.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Ghoulish Claws. You are proficient with your unarmed strikes, which deal 1d6 slashing damage on a hit.

Paralyzing Strike. When you hit a humanoid or beast with your claws, you can force the target to make a DC Constitution saving throw DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier. If the creature fails its saving throw, it is paralyzed for up to 1 minute. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Elves succeed their saving throw automatically. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you complete a long rest.

Ghoulish Nature. You are immune to poison damage and can't be poisoned. You must maintain a diet of rotting flesh (at least 72 hours after death), in equal portion to the amount of food a living member of your original race would require. Your muscles require the same amount of rest that your original race would in order to stave off exhaustion.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

Racial Feat: Ghastly Power

Prerequisite: Ghoul, 8th Level

Your abyssal powers grow, and you gain the following benefits:

· ***Ghastly Stench.*** You can cast the *Stinking Cloud* spell once. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for the spell. Once you cast the spell, you can't cast it again with this trait until you finish a short or long rest.

· ***Turn Defiance.*** As a reaction, you emanate an aura of defiance, granting you and undead creatures of your choice within 30 feet of you advantage on saving throws against effects that turn undead. You can use this feature twice, and regain expended uses of it when you complete a long rest.

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Illustration by Uriak

Mummies: Awakened to Old Purpose

Mummies become undead not long after their deaths, but most do not awaken until a long slumber has passed. The contingencies that animate them are not always up to them. Most mummies are protectors and guardians, meant to keep something – cursed treasure, powerful artifacts, or unspeakable evils contained. Some are meant only to watch over the remains of a royal family, ensuring their tombs stay undisturbed. Depending on the length of their slumber, an awakened mummy might find themselves in a world they scarcely recognize. However, the time that has passed has no effect on their preservation, nor their compulsion to see the will of their creators done, until what has been done has been undone, at which time the mummy will resume their slumber until they are called to reanimate again.

Mummies are strong, resilient and nearly unstoppable by conventional means. They speak in a strained and gravelly tone, and those who wish to hide their true nature often take to wearing masks and covering as much of their bodies as possible to disguise themselves.

Mummy Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength score increases by 2, and your Constitution score increases by 1.

Age. Mummies do not age, nor do they decay. If they maintain a diet of living flesh, they can endure unlife for many years after their conversion, up to as long as the lifespan of their original species.

Alignment. Mummies are lawful almost without exception (unless they were royalty), or they share the alignment of their creator.

Size. Mummies can be of most any race before they died. Your size is Medium or Small.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read and write any languages you knew in life.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Superior Preservation. Your hit point maximum increases by 1, and it increases by 1 every time you gain a level. You know the *Blade Ward* cantrip, and can cast it as a bonus action. However, you wrapping and dried flesh burn readily. You are vulnerable to fire damage.

Strength of Will. You cannot be charmed, or become exhausted. You are immune to poison damage, and you can't be poisoned. You don't require air, food, drink, or sleep, but must rest motionless in order to regain abilities that may require a short or long rest.

Necrotic Resilience. You have advantage on saving throws against spells or abilities that deal necrotic damage, and you have resistance against necrotic damage.

Weapon Training. You are proficient with scimitars, shields and longbows.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

Racial Feat: Necrotic Affinity

Prerequisite: Mummy

Your affinity with necrotic energy grows, and you can sustain yourself with it. You gain the following benefits:

- Your Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom or Charisma score increases by 1.
- When you take necrotic damage, you can use your reaction to gain temporary hit points equal to half the amount instead. These temporary hit points fade after 1 hour. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

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Illustration by Jason Nguyen

Skeletons: Freedom from Flesh

Skeletons are raised by curses or necromancy, usually from remains that are so old that little to no flesh or organs remain upon the bones. Without the tiresome requirements of the body's incessant desire for food, pleasure and excretion, most skeletons awaken to find great pleasure in purpose and activity, measuring their unlife in deeds and accomplishments they never would have had the time or energy to accomplish while still alive.

Skeletons make tireless laborers, and despite their lack of a brain, some skeletons are shockingly intelligent, able to recall things about their life and times from an entirely new and detached perspective. However, traditional communication is difficult without a tongue, and not every skeleton manages to learn to discuss the finer points of existence with anyone other than fellow skeletons. These silent beings spent most of the rest of their existences carrying out their tasks in relative silence with only the occasional scrape or rattle of bones punctuating the din of a well-kept crypt.

Skeleton Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom score increases by 2, and your Intelligence increases by 1.

Age. Skeletons do not age, but they do break. They can endure unlife for several centuries after they are raised, up to three times as long as the lifespan of their original species.

Alignment. Due to their undead nature, skeletons are raised to evil alignments, but as they gain independence, they often drift toward neutrality, becoming cold and detached, melancholic or droll cynics.

Languages. You can't speak, but you can understand the languages you knew in life.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You can understand, read and write any languages you knew in life. You can communicate telepathically with other skeletons within 30 feet of you, regardless of the languages you knew in life.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Skeletal Nature. You are immune to poison damage, and you can't be poisoned. You don't require air, food, drink, or sleep, but must rest motionless in order to regain abilities that may require a short or long rest.

Collapse. When you do rest, you collapse into a pile of bones, including your worn equipment. You remain aware of your surroundings, and are completely indiscernible from a corpse unless divined by magical means, such as paladin's *Divine Sense* or the *Detect Good and Evil* spell. You can resume your normal stance and stature using your reaction.

Memory. You have advantage on Intelligence (History) checks you make to recall events from the time period in which you expired.

Sticks and Stones. You resist piercing and slashing damage from non-magical attacks.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

Bag o' Bones!

While the lack of a tongue inhibits a skeleton's ability speak, awakened skeletons find ways of working around this limitation.

Spells like *illusory script, message, minor illusion, prestidigitation*, and *thaumaturgy*, allow a skeleton to communicate with another creature, and given time, they might form a more complex and useful shorthand with such individuals.

Rhythmic tapping of bones, or blinking patterns with spells such as *dancing lights* or *produce flame* might also serve as sort of code to communicate with an ally.

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Illustration by Ertaç Altınöz

Wights: Vengeance at Any Cost

Wights are unique among the undead for their unique ability to raise themselves, out of nothing more than an exceptionally a strong compulsion for a singular purpose: vengeance at any cost. Most commonly, this vengeance is targeted at the individual who killed them, or the person they deem responsible for their own death, but it also may be sworn on behalf of someone else: a parent, a lover, or a child. Unfortunately little else tends to remain of their former personality.

Wights are most commonly created in the wake of great battles, in times of wars, or other eras of strife where vengeance is a driving influence of life, and so it becomes one in death. A wight that achieves their goals and extracts their vengeance is freed from the curse of undeath, and their soul is freed to move on to the next phase of its existence.

Wights typically have no compunction about killing any and everything that gets in between themselves and the target of their vengeance, but they are not foolhardy. Most look upon their task with a cold, military detachment, planning ahead and ensuring their victories, making them ideal commanders for other undead to follow.

Wight Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution, Intelligence and Wisdom scores increase by 1.

Age. Wights do not age, and their flesh does not decay. They can endure unlife indefinitely after they are raised.

Alignment. Wights are invariably of evil alignments.

Size. Wights can be of most any race before they died. Your size is Medium or Small.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 30 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read and write any languages you knew in life.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Sense Mortality. The presence of living creatures registers on your senses like a noxious odor. As an action, you can open your awareness to detect life force. Until the end of your next turn, you

know the location of any beast, dragon, elemental, fey, humanoid, giant or monstrosity within 60 feet of you that is not behind total cover. You know the type of any being whose presence you sense, but not its identity (Lord Bartholomew Van Der Woodsen, for instance). Within the same radius, you also detect the presence of any place or object that has been consecrated or desecrated, as with the *hallow* spell. Once you use this trait, you must complete a short or long rest before you use it again.

Life Drain. When you hit a humanoid with a melee weapon attack, you can use a bonus action to force the target to make a Constitution saving throw DC 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Constitution modifier. If they fail, they take a number of d6s equal to your proficiency bonus as necrotic damage. If they succeed, they take half the amount. You gain half the amount of necrotic damage dealt as temporary hit points. Once you use this trait, you can't do so again until you finish a long rest.

Wight Nature. You are immune to poison damage and exhaustion, and you can't be poisoned. You don't require air, food, drink, or sleep, but must rest motionless in order to regain abilities that may require a short or long rest.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

Racial Feat: Raise Into Service

Prerequisite: Wight

Your Charisma score increases by 1.

Additionally, humanoid that fails its saving throw against and is slain by your *Life Drain* rises 1 minute later as a zombie under your control as if you had created it with the *Animate Dead* spell. You can use this trait to reassert control over a raised zombie as required by the spell.

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Illustration by Antarctic Spring

Zombies: The Living Dead

Zombies are most commonly raised by necromancy or alchemy gone awry. When a zombie devours their meals, they gain only sustenance, and no pleasure from it, and no matter how ravenously devoured, the flesh of the living tastes only of ash and filth. Awakened zombies go to lengths to spice or salt their food, stimulating their decaying taste buds any way they can. If a zombie indulges in their forbidden hunger and eats the brains of another creature, they can experience life as the living do for a short time. Most zombies become addicted to these visions, losing their former selves to them.

Most spend their short un-lives in service to their creators, but a few overcome their insatiable hunger long enough to remember something of their former lives. Awakened zombies retain some of their personality and experiences, and remember parts of their life as a fuzzy dream of conflicting messages, feelings and emotions.

Zombie Racial Traits

Ability Score Increase. Your Constitution score increases by 2, and one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Age. Zombies do not age, but they do decay. If they maintain a diet of living flesh, they can endure unlife for many years after their conversion, up to as long as the lifespan of their original species.

Alignment. Due to their undead nature and insatiable appetite, zombies tend to drift toward evil alignments over the course of their tortured existence.

Size. Zombies can be of most any race before they died. Your size is Medium or Small.

Speed. Your base walking speed is 25 feet.

Languages. You can speak, read and write any languages you knew in life.

Darkvision. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light, and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Living Dead. You must maintain a diet of living or freshly dead flesh (within 1 minute of death), in equal portion to the amount of food a living member of your original species would require. Your muscles require the same amount of rest that your original race would in order to stave off exhaustion.

Remnants of a Life Lost. You can select one racial trait from your original race of your choice.

Thought for Food. If you devour at least one mouthful of brain from a deceased creature, for the next 24 hours, you can experience memories of their life as if you had cast the *Detect Thoughts spell* upon the creature. The target creature does not make a saving throw, and you experience a memory of theirs as a vision from their own perspective. The nature of the vision is determined by the Dungeon Master. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short rest.

Undead Fortitude. You are immune to poison damage and can't be poisoned. When you succeed a death saving throw, you can immediately gain 1 hit point. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Undead Nature. Your creature type is undead instead of humanoid.

Racial Feat: Back from the Dead

Prerequisite: Zombie

Your Constitution score increases by 1.

When you regain a hit point due to your *Undead Fortitude*, you can immediately spend hit dice, up to a number equal to your proficiency bonus.

Updates to these races will be made available as PDF a download in ***Old Gus: Errata: Plantfolk, Undead and Other Oddities:*** https://callmepartario.github.io/old-gus-errata/